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AUTHOR	Keeney, Lorraine, Ed.; Devaney, Kathleen, Ed.
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ABSTRACT

Articles in this document are edited from talks and discussions that took place at the 1979, 1980, and 1981 Workparties (four-day retreat/conferences) sponsored for rural educators by the Teachers' Centers Exchange. Workparties were held in collaboration with Mountain Towns' Teacher Center, Wilmington, Vermont (1978), Washington West Resource Center, Waitsfield, Vermont (1979), Western Nebraska (Sidney) Rural Teacher Center (1980), and Texarkana (Arkansas) Teacher Center (1981). The 1979 panel discussion, "Don't Try to 'Deliver' Rural Education," addresses the unique values of the rural community and the role of teachers' centers in promoting those values. The 1980 panel discussion, "If You Work in Rural Schools, You're Working with the Rural Community," focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of rural schooling. "Where Quiet Voices Can Be Heard" reflects a teacher's experiences with special education classes and with teachers' centers. "New Options for Rural High Schools" describes possible uses of the rural school environment as the basis for curriculum and ways teacher centers might advance those ideas. "How a Rural Superintendent Can Help Start a Teachers' Center" describes the building of the center in Cortland, New York. "Touching Inward Springs" offers suggestions for incorporating the experiences of rural youngsters and community members into the curriculum. (CM)

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T&C • TRANSCRIPTS AND COMMENTARIES .3

Teachers Centers Exchange January 1982

Four Workparties Focus on Rural Education

The School of Education at a major public university in the West is housed in an immense, severely modern office building with beetling brows. Across a green lawn stands an older and smaller building of engaging lightness and graciousness, decorated with pink frescoes of twining vines, flowers, and cornucopias, and also with sculpted medallions of farm products--pig, horse, sheep, beehive, grapes, sheaf of wheat. Across the whole front of this older building, under the eaves, are bas-relief heads of cows with garlands around their necks, and carved under the noble bovines is the motto, "To Rescue for Human Society the Native Values of Rural Life."

Neglect of those values has produced buildings like the former, whose stern and sterile visage suggests the difficulties that lie within, in enterprises that attempt to prepare teachers and administrators for their work in bureaucratic schools, that generate and transmit educational theory, that confront the problems of schooling with the tools of academia--statistics and scholarly papers. The discouragement that institutions like this now convey suggests further that perhaps confidence in "native values" is not so naive as we have thought and that perhaps we should set erudition aside for a bit and inquire whether some of "the native values of rural life" might help us to rescue schooling. True, we cannot go back and recreate the era when the older hall was built. But we can acknowledge and appreciate its strengths and benefits and in the name of economy and aesthetics determine to preserve and rehabilitate it--not as a charming relic or a museum but as an abidingly functional structure for people today.

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In the same way, we can recognize, appreciate, and renovate--all in the spirit of preserving and using original values and strengths--the rural schools that remain in America today. This is the purpose of those teachers' centers located in rural areas and/or serving rural teachers. This has been the theme of the four annual Workparties the Teachers' Centers Exchange has sponsored for the educators linked in a network focusing on rural interests. These Workparties--small four-day retreat/conferences--have been held in collaboration with Mountain Towns' Teacher Center, Wilmington, VT (1978), Washington West Resource Center, Waitsfield, Vt (1979), Western Nebraska Rural Teacher Center in Sidney (1980), and Texarkana (AR) Teacher Center (1981). The teachers' center directors who worked with Lorraine Keeney of the Exchange staff to plan and conduct these Workparties were Anne Watt, Wade Scherer, Marge Curtiss, and Mary Hamilton. The articles in this third issue of Transcripts & Commentaries are edited from talks and discussions that took place at the 1979, 1980, and 1981 Workparties. Your commentaries in response are invited.

If you would like extra copies of this issue of T & C 3, write Jean Sims at our office in San Francisco. We will send up to 35 copies free.

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DON'T TRY TO "DELIVER" RURAL EDUCATION; HELP IT TO SURFACE FROM THE COMMUNITY

[In August 1979 at Waitsfield, VT, Lorraine Keeney asked three panelists to engage with three questions: What does the uniqueness of the rural setting mean for schooling? (Is there a rural curriculum, a rural style of teaching, a rural style of learning?) What programs do rural teachers need from a teachers' center and how does a center provide them? How does the rural center build a strong relationship with the community? The panelists were Celia Houghton, director of the Goddard Teachers' Center, Plainfield, VT, who grew up in a rural village in England; Karen Fraley, a field agent for the Southeast Idaho Teacher Center Consortium; and Tom Gjelten, who had taught in rural Maine, worked with teachers in Alaska, and was at the time on the staff of the National Rural Center in Washington, D.C.]

Celia: I question whether a city person really can understand how things happen in a very rural area. It seems that children must see things in cycles. In a very little while, as you have probably noticed, the leaves here in Vermont will change and this place will be a fire, a spectacular place. And then will come the white, and then will come the mud, and then will come the rebirth, and it is very visible and very dramatic. It just seems to me that children, particularly in farm areas, see the cycles. Not being a city person, I wonder what the difference is there. When I lived in New York, I felt that there was a lot of stimulation but many fragmented experiences that didn't hang together as a sort of cycle. I was exploring it as a kind of fault. What then is appropriate, what is real teaching in rural schools? What is real curriculum, what should you actually hope to be doing that will take note of and build on what children already know because of being in a rural area? This isn't anything that I have any answers for, just something that I find rather interesting.

Tom: I taught in a very small school in an isolated community. I had come to that school originally because, like a number of the teachers there, I wanted to work in a small community-oriented school. The school administrators did not appear to have chosen their jobs for similar reasons. I was in the school five years and we had five different superintendents. Each came with their own idea of good education, of what a school system ought to do. These premises were fashioned by their experience in a variety of schools. We had a constant battle with the superintendents over whether the professional notions of good education that they had were necessarily appropriate in our school.

Here we were eighty kids and seven teachers in an isolated community, and we couldn't switch textbooks every few years like big city schools, we couldn't have highly specialized teachers, we couldn't have laboratory facilities and instructional support equipment and materials. And besides, we just felt that what the kids in North Haven needed to learn was different from what the kids in urban and suburban schools needed to learn. On the one hand, they had experiences, very rich experiences, which kids from another environment had not had, and we felt that what went on in the school should build on the strength that those kids had as a result of their own unique experiences. And, on

the other hand, there were gaps in their experiences which didn't exist for other kids, and so the educational programs needed to address those gaps. So a lot of what we tried to do on that tiny island was to come up with some of our own approaches.

As far as whether rural children learn differently, there are some cautions that I feel. I worked quite a bit in Appalachia last fall, and there is an attitude on the part of teachers in the larger consolidated schools that the kids coming in from the mountains are mentally impaired. Basically, there is this attitude that the hillbilly children's minds are in some way not quite as well developed as those of the city children. It was just a matter of the kids having different experiences, but teachers were saying they don't learn as well. I strongly reject that view.

Celia: I think that learning happens by connecting a new experience with a previous experience. The child's own statement about himself comes out of his own experience. A predetermined curriculum, a prescribed curriculum that doesn't take into account the richness of those experiences and that undervalues some of the great strengths in rural living makes children appear slow, because people are trying to teach them something that doesn't match with children's own experiences. I wouldn't want to say at all that rural children learn differently; only that children learn by connecting new information with what their previous experiences are. We mess them up by trying to teach them something that doesn't match and by not looking at what the child is focusing on.

Karen: All of Idaho is rural. I see certain advantages to being rural. There is strength in a strong family base. The communities are homogeneous and close-knit. We have a fairly low student-teacher ratio in most of those small towns, so the teachers tend to get fairly close to the student. On the other hand, materials are not in abundance; recruiting teachers is a problem; some are teaching in their minor field or out of field; they may have to prepare for five different courses because they are everything to everybody. A major problem is teacher isolation. They receive little help. We had three university towns and that's where all the inservice happened. People from tiny little areas were expected to go and stuff themselves into a program. So they have been very glad to see someone from our center. When they find out that they might actually have a person come to their district and provide workshops or a course or whatever it is that they want, that's meaningful.

Tom: At the National Rural Center my colleagues and I have been talking about the difference between the problems and approach in rural health and in rural education. The problem of rural health becomes how do you get doctors and nurses and medicine to rural people? It's very much a delivery issue. Good health doesn't mean one thing in an isolated community and something quite different in a large urban community. Health is health. There is a danger in looking at education the same way, viewing education as a set of skills and a body of knowledge. Those who view education as "delivery" see the main problem facing us in rural education as how to deliver skills and knowledge to rural children. But what we are saying is that, to be well educated, rural people need something quite different from what well educated urban people need. And so the whole delivery metaphor isn't an appropriate one to use in rural education. Instead we need to think about how you allow good education to surface in rural communities and the ways that it is different from but equal to good

education in another place.

Karen: I agree. Small communities have been made to feel like second-class citizens in terms of education. We used to take the big city, Boise, and try to copy what they were doing. With no resources, rural schools were to make the sow's ear into a silken purse. And it frustrated rural communities. We have had a lot of students leave Idaho in the past because we unknowingly promoted the idea that rural communities were behind the times. When and if you got wheels you would leave and go where real life was. A good many of us have ended up back in Idaho. We discovered that we had it at home. I think that it has been good for teachers in rural communities to realize that they are offering something unique that is just as good a quality as in urban areas.

Help them see what they've got

Celia: I think that the greatest need for the education of kids and the continuing education of teachers is to make it all more genuinely personal, more real and more authentic. In rural teachers' centers, every teacher counts. You have to somehow respond to the individual needs of every teacher, including the need of every teacher to connect with other teachers. The most crucial thing is helping teachers overcome the isolation of small schools, bad roads, bad weather, and few resources. And this is also true for the kids. I went to a school a while back way up in the Northeast Kingdom and said, "In what way can we be helpful?" The teacher said, with terrific sincerity, "Bring the kids a new face, bring them a new idea. The winters are very long. There are only three of us, you know." I think that it's nice for teachers to get something new and fresh in terms of materials coming in, but the real thing is to help them see what they've got. It doesn't have to be the glossy package about subways in San Francisco, but what they've got in the lively, natural environment that they can build a whole curriculum around.

Karen: We're giving lots of emphasis in our center on the resources that we have. I am speaking mostly about people because we don't really have much money for materials. Our director recently was at a Kiwanis meeting, and he asked people if they had a skill that might be helpful in the schools. They were very enthusiastic; they were quite pleased that someone would feel they had some expertise to share with the schools. I feel the organizations that I become involved in are those where people have asked me to do something. There are people who can meet needs of rural students because they themselves are rural and they have credibility. It's not a professor coming in. This is someone who is in the real world of that community.

Tom: I think that Karen's point is really good. I think there are some notions that are associated with the teachers' center movement that are just simply inappropriate in rural areas. How you help form a sense of community and mutual support is assumed to mean a sense of community and mutual support among teachers. It's easy to forget that there already are very strong communities in rural areas. I think that what is essential for rural teachers is not how to form a sense of community among each other but how to be brought into the community that already exists there. And if the role of teachers' centers is to provide a kind of insulating and mutually supportive place where teachers can get together and be professional and thereby keep themselves somewhat separated from the experience of the community at large, then I think that teachers' centers face the danger of doing more harm than good: perhaps reinforcing an alienation between teachers and people in the community. On the other hand, if the staff and programming in teachers' centers helps rural teachers find

uniquely rural answers to the educational problems in their schools then I think they have a very useful role.

Inservice was very important for us on North Haven Island. We had Casey Murrow come out because we had seen his book Using our Communities (Community Studies Research Project, Box 156, Marlboro, VT 05344). There is just nothing to compare it with for learning how to gain some independence from your math textbook and use what's right around the school to be your math curriculum; to get independence from the science laboratory, learn to use the woods and the meadows. And to gain independence from the social studies textbook, and learn to teach social studies through student exchanges and field trips. I think that teachers' centers can do a lot to assist rural teachers in formulating some of those activities.

Celia: I think that is super, what you just said. If I don't get anything else out of this Workparty, it's been worth it. The creative link that was quite vital to me is, "Yeah, overcome the isolation of teachers by helping them in that community, and not only networking isolated teachers to other teachers." Making those connections is supportive and helpful, but the essence of the thing, as you say, is where that teacher is and where that school is.

WHERE QUIET VOICES CAN BE HEARD

By Peter H. Martin

[This is an edited version of a talk reflecting on experiences in teaching and in teachers' centers, given at the Rural Workparty at Fort Robinson State Park, Nebraska, in June 1980. Peter Martin is the founder and director of Project RISE (Regional In-Service Education) in Colchester, Connecticut. RISE is an inservice center serving teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents in 13 schools within nine rural and small-town districts--Andover, Bozrah, Colchester, Franklin, Hebron, Lebanon, Marlborough, RHAM, and Salem.]

I started out life as a young baby. I think that this is quite indigenous or unique, I should say, to rural areas because I did work in the inner city also and found that babies there seem to come out about 15 years old. In contrast, I think rural kids start out young. I was born in Maine two days before Christmas. My father was a teacher and later became superintendent of the school where I went to school. My mother was also a teacher, and in my rebellious teenage years I was determined I was going to

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strike out on my own path, and I was not going to be a teacher. But through a circuitous route I did become one.

I spent four years teaching at an institution for profoundly and severely retarded people, and I fit in rather well. This experience formed a lot of ideas and questions that I still haven't resolved. They had what they called the back ward break-in. This was to weed out the weak-stomached and the weak-muscled. I weighed about 120 at the time and lost nearly 18 pounds in my first two weeks of work, lifting people out of bassinettes--55 and 60-year-old people who weighed more than I did--to bathe them and so forth.

My proudest accomplishment during this time, was that I taught a 41-year-old how to feed himself. It took two months, two hours a day. And when you think of what it takes to feed yourself, and all the steps in that process, you realize it's very complicated for someone who has no idea how to do it. So it took a lot of time and patience and a lot of resources--my own and the state's. And I began to question after four years whether it was really worth the time I put into it. And the money of the state. I wondered how many kids who were less severely retarded could be helped with the same amount of effort. And so I grew discouraged about the work, and I wanted to go try something new.

I went to college in the 60's and I was ready to take over the world, with my goodness and--you know what it was like--my enthusiasm, so I went into the inner city. They were begging for teachers, and I went into special ed. Moving to the city was a shock to me--a cultural shock. I grew up in a rural area where you could observe a blade of grass growing: you'd notice it because change was so slow, and there were so few changes. But in the city I got a wicked headache after half an hour walking down the street. I tried to figure out why and I realized that in one half hour in the city ten years of change took place, by my standards. Change was everywhere and I was trying to absorb it all and observe everything the way I did in the slower pace of a rural area.

I entered the school where I was to teach, and it was an old school and all the classroom doors were closed. The principal was giving me a tour, but the transoms were open--the windows over the doors. And in one room after another I heard, "Sit down and be quiet or I'll whip your butt." And after I heard about eight of those, I said, I'm not going to be that way. I'm not going to be that kind of teacher. But after about a week, I was yelling, "Sit down and . . !" It seemed unavoidable at the beginning.

I thought my first class was brilliant. They were special ed kids. The union had won the right to bus out the most difficult child from each school. That collection of kids was my first class as a beginning teacher. But I did think they were brilliant because, you remember, I took a long time teaching someone how to feed himself. Now, I opened up a book and asked one of the kids if there were any words that he could recognize, and he looked a little concerned, and I realized I'd given him something much too hard. But he did find the word "the" and he read it, and I thought that was brilliant, and I wondered why he was in special ed. He was a sixth grader, but my perspective was all thrown off. I really did think these kids were very, very bright, and they thought I was strange because I was the first one ever to think so, and yet they knew I was genuine, and they didn't know quite what to make of it.

I think the accomplishment then that I was proudest of, in the

way of teaching academic things, was teaching Craig how to read. Craig was a sixth grader--the one who read the word "the." But he could read nothing else except his name. He was very street wise--I don't want you to get the impression that these kids were not intelligent. So I tried to figure out how to teach him to read. I had had reading courses; they were probably as good as most of you had. I discovered by accident that Craig was the Picasso of the bathrooms, and upon discovering this I went in to look at some of his work and found his detail quite convincing. I also noticed that under each picture there was usually a word, and I learned from that that Craig did know some words. And his vocabulary consisted of four four-letter words. And I thought this was a great beginning because when you take the word d---, for example, or f--- you can go a long way and get a lot of mileage out of that with just the vowel patterns. If that didn't work, I realized that there was some association he was making that was powerful enough to him to get through whatever learning difficulty he had. So Craig and I made a pact, and I told him that I could be fired for teaching him to read in the way that I was going to, but I said, "I think I can teach you." So we would sneak away with our foul pictures into an unused stairwell during breaks and whip out the vocabulary cards and then dash back to the classroom. By the time his vocabulary had increased to twelve words we were ready to move away from that and we were able to get back into teaching in the regular way. By the end of the year he was reading about a grade and a half ahead of where he had been, which was nowhere.

Perhaps I was on the wrong track

Louis was the rule breaker. He would find out what the situation was and he would break all the rules. That was his mission in life. But I learned something about Louis when each month it would be one or two student's turn to help me after school arrange the classroom in the way that they would like. And Louis arranged all the desks in rows. I had been trained in open education, and my room was untraditional looking. My desk was in a corner of the room, out of the way. I used it for stacking materials. Louis asked me to help him move my desk, and he moved it dead center. Right up in front. And then he went to the blackboard, took a pointer out of the chalk tray, and he stood in front of the room, and he passed me the pointer and said, "Now teach." And it made me wonder if perhaps I was on the wrong track. That these kids with their home life so unstable needed stability. They needed structure. And part of that structure was controlling the number of choices according to the ability of the kids to handle choice. And that was a subtle distinction that I hadn't made. I had assumed that choice was good, and that you were individualizing when you gave kids choice.

And one last story about another child, James. The district was trying to create "multi-instructional areas." They called them MIA's, and I called them "missing-in-action" because that's what happened to many of the kids who couldn't handle it. They knocked out the walls between classrooms without asking teachers if they wanted to work together. James came to my room only two hours a day. Later he wiped out in one of those classrooms, and then he stayed with me for the whole day.

James came down one Friday afternoon, and he was excited. He was a fourth grader, and he said, "My teacher has a surprise for us." I said, "What is it?" "She won't tell us till Monday." So that was all there was to it. Monday, James came down in tears and he said, "My desk is gone." And I found out that they had moved all the desks out over the weekend in

preparation for going "open" and had stored them underneath the school. So James and I went down after school, and we looked for that desk, and there were stacks and stacks of desks, and we took each one down and we looked, because he had a Snoopy sticker inside of his, and we found it after about 30 desks. And he was just--I can't describe how good he felt having found his desk. And I asked him if he wanted to put it in our room. That wasn't necessary. He just wanted to know it was there, and he wanted us to move it out near the doorway where if he wanted to come down and visit it he could.

The city pace was too quick

My first inservice workshop was learning about the alarm bells. Three longs and three shorts meant the school was under seige, and each teacher was to rush to the command post assigned to them. The inservice workshop covered all the bell signals, but this is the one upon which we spent the most time. This was during the time of the racial riots in the city, and I hoped that we would never need this information. But it turned out that this first inservice workshop was indeed relevant to my needs. Because we did have the alarm sounded, and the first thing that was done was to chain the doors from the inside, to padlock them--a practice that was stopped after the fire marshall in the city objected. But it was to protect the kids and us.

We had no other inservice, and if anyone needed inservice it was teachers like myself working in special ed under conditions that were extremely difficult. So I decided to get together with teachers who were out there somewhere with classes like mine. There were six of us. We got together and we shared ideas, and we supported each other, and we consoled each other. We did that for a year, and that was the beginning of my commitment to the importance of doing teachers' center kind of work. Inservice work. And I decided then that if the opportunity ever came for me to do that kind of work, that was what I wanted to do.

That spring, after three years of teaching, not counting the retarded institution work, Vincent Rogers called me up and said, "We're starting a center for open education and I would like you to be on the staff." I said, "Terrific!"

My ecstacy was more than because I had a chance to work at a center; it was also that I was leaving the city and going back into the country. The pace in the city was too quick for my own rhythms, my own way of being. I also felt that change was too quick--so much so that I couldn't have much control over things that were happening. Things just seemed to be happening all around me, and there were so many people and so many systems. There was such complexity. There were so many factors involved in change that it seemed impossible for an individual to know the causes of things much less to influence the outcomes.

Being in the city made me realize how much I appreciated being a big fish in a small pond. How in a rural area, it really is a small pond, and most fish can be big. And that really is a beautiful part, and a healthiness of a rural area--that each person is important. If one person doesn't do their particular job that work is missed, their presence is missed. Being able to know most of the fish in the pond is another advantage to a rural area that I had missed a great deal. I'd been a small part of a very big picture in the city. People didn't know me and I didn't know them for the most part.

There were also the aesthetic reasons, and they were important. I did see a beauty in the city, but I didn't <u>feel</u> it like I did in the country. I would drive out on

hot summer days, take my car and go out into the country and feel my sense of smell coming back alive. And the greenness and the air moving and the sense of space. It was something I'd missed a great deal and had to keep going back to.

I also think my personality lends itself more to a rural area. I'm not a wave maker. I'm not outspoken. My work is quiet work, and it's noticed and appreciated where there is quietness. But where there's such a level of static all the time quiet voices are not heard.

And I worked four years with that center. We made a drop-in teachers' center in a room at the Storrs Grammar School just off the University of Connecticut campus, and we gave workshops and seminars, but the main thing I did was work as an advisor to teachers in their classrooms. Teachers who asked me to help. I learned how to walk the tightrope: when to give teachers a gentle push, when to back off; whom to approach, whom to leave alone; what and how to communicate with administrators; when to be an errand-runner for a teacher and when to refuse; when to walk into a classroom and when not to; how to get a long-term project going in a classroom. Advising is a delicate combination of non-threatening assertiveness, warmth, integrity, empathy, and dignity. And just plain toil. You do not encourage a teacher to do anything you would not do yourself, so often you roll up your sleeves and help move furniture, or build equipment, or work with a group of students on a project. Most of what you have to give to teachers is the sharing of your effort, your experience, your company, your outside viewpoint, your own uniqueness. And while I was doing that, I also got my Ph.D.

And then I started Project RISE in one of the schools where I had worked as an advisor. That meant designing an inservice structure and programs with the teachers and principals and superintendents of nine east central Connecticut towns where there's not a lot of indigenous understanding and sympathy from school boards for the notion of teachers still having to be growing. But we called our project RISE, which simply means Regional In-Service Education, and it has risen and grown to include advisors going out to the schools, and local school inservice workshops, and regional inservice special events, and a central teachers' center workplace for all the nine towns' teachers. And I've been doing that for four years.

So I tried to look back on these stories, on seemingly unrelated things, and try to see if there are any themes in it. And I decided I'm too young. I'm 33, and maybe in about 10 or 15 years I'll be able to look back and know what all this means. There are just a few themes I see now. There are the threads of love, commitment, and challenge. Those are things that seem to mark my life. I have a tremendous joy in my work. I have never done anything so satisfying as being director of the teachers' center. The commitment I can give to it, the love I have for the people I work with, the challenge of it. And the variety of it, too. Going to a state meeting with a bunch of uppity-up muck-a-mucks and all, and then going into a classroom and working with a group of kids and the teacher, and then helping someone build a tri-wall bookcase, and then working with the staff member who's having a problem, all in one day, makes me feel very fortunate. How many people really are this privileged?

Three years ago I had a long illness, a serious one. I could have died four different times in a four-month period, and I was in the hospital bed looking over my life and asking myself, was I fulfilled in my life? And I decided

I was, because I had been true to the commitment and the challenge and the love--to all those things. But there was something still missing, and that was having a woman in my life in addition to all my work, to be committed to and to love and to find challenging, and when Gretchen and I were married last Thursday, it fulfilled that want.

As I look to the future I think of children, a family. And I think of changes at RISE. I am a builder. Maintenance work takes the fun away for me. One of the difficulties at RISE right now is that there are tremendous amounts of maintenance energy required to keep what we have going, yet I want to be designing and moving ahead to something new. And I know that we're ready, if we had the financial stability to move to something new. But we don't, so that keeps me from a dream that I have for the center: that we become a community center, and be a resource for learning and knowledge for people of all ages and all walks of life. To integrate and tie the community and the school.

I think making changes within RISE is one way to grow while staying in the same work. It seems like a lot of people tell me that they've been at their job for three years or four years or five years and it's time to move on. I'd rather view moving on as staying on, but in a new way--new branches on an old tree with established roots.

IF YOU WORK IN RURAL SCHOOLS, YOU'RE WORKING WITH THE RURAL COMMUNITY

[In June 1980 at the Rural Workparty in Nebraska's state park at Fort Robinson, Lorraine Keeney again led a panel discussion: this time on the advantages and disadvantages of rural schooling. Panelists were Aleene Neilsen, policy board president of the center in Moab, UT, Wade Scherer, then director of Washington West Resource Center in Waitsfield, VT (who is now at Syracuse University), and Paul Nachtigal in Denver (and of the Exchange's advisory committee). Paul had just completed his study for NIE of 14 rural education improvement efforts, including a range of federally and locally funded programs ("Rural Education: In Search of a Better Way," edited by Paul Nachtigal, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1982). While the discussion of 1979, summarized here in "Don't try to 'deliver' rural education" (page 3), advocated that teachers' centers underline the unique values of the rural community, this 1980 discussion touched a different theme: the inescapable juxtaposition and merging of urban and rural communities and their schools because of the mobility of Americans.]

Aleene: Love of school was ingrained in me very early. My father was a teacher and later on a superintendent. I remember walking to school when I had to hold my hand up to reach my father's hand and feeling how proud I was that I could walk to school with my father. Rural schools have a feeling of belonging like an extended family that you don't get in a much larger school. For example, when I started junior high school, I went to a school that was grades 7 to 12, and later on when I was a senior I knew people five years younger than me. When I began to

teach school in northeastern Arkansas, they didn't have a home ec job for me, so I began doing what I did in rural schools for a great deal of my life: teaching something besides what I was trained for. You don't fall back on the kinds of things you were trained to do, you fall back on the things that you have observed other teachers doing. And, having grown up in a rural school where there was a tradition of doing, you never believe that there is anything you can't do; you go ahead and do the job that is there to be done.

Who refills your own well?

That, perhaps, is one of the strengths of smaller schools: Children who want to do things, and sometimes even those who are a little reluctant to do things, are pushed into performing frequently, into taking a job and following through and getting it done much more often than children who go to larger schools. That balances, to a certain extent, the lack of opportunities to compete with people who are more equal, who might serve as a role model or stimulus to stretch their wings and improve their talents.

I think you don't necessarily go to teach in a rural school because you think the rural school experience is going to be great. I think you go to a rural area to live because there are some things in that community that you want, and you teach in the schools in spite of the shortcomings and the handicaps you run into. There are several things that I think are very good about rural schools. You have much easier access to your administrators. I think most of us from a rural area probably can call the superintendent by first name and have known him for enough years that we know how to approach him best. The same is true of the principals and a lot of the people on the school board. There are a lot more leadership opportunities. You have more opportunities to participate in community and cultural activities. In fact, more than you probably have time to handle, because if you're the music teacher in the school then you're the logical candidate to direct the community choir and the logical person to put on the community musical at Christmas time. You do have to learn to protect yourself. And I think your identity is a little more secure in a small town. You are reinforced by people who know you--more frequently, I think, than you are when you live in a large city. I think we have what is very important to me, which is access to wilderness. In order to leave Salt Lake City, where I lived for about ten years, and get to a place that was not frequented by a great many people, I would have to drive at least an hour, and then I wouldn't be in a place where I feel as comfortable as I can get to from my home in ten minutes.

Now, on the other side, there are some definite disadvantages. One is the expectation that teachers perform a great many of the volunteer services: the Little League, the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Sunday School, any job that needs to be done with young children. Another disadvantage that sometimes is the most difficult for teachers is that there is not enough stimulation from people who have the same kinds of interests that you do. A teacher very often becomes a person that others come to for advice, or to be reassured. A teachers' center director experiences this doubly because the teachers come to the director. There isn't a person to go to to refill your own well so that you will have enough to give to the people who come to you for help.

Wade: I came to Vermont really by accident. I was on my way out West, and I met some fine people in Nova Scotia who said, "Come back to our home in Vermont and visit for a few days." And I did and really never left. At that time there were shortages of teachers. I got

immersed in a rural school that our teachers' center now serves. I worked with my master teacher for months and learned an awful lot from her. She had grown up in Vermont and had taught for twenty years. After that experience I knew that I wanted to teach, and I wanted to teach in a really small school and really get my feet wet and experiment with a lot of ideas I had at the time.

So I did teach in a two-room schoolhouse that was 140 years old. It was over a mountain that bordered the Sugar Bush ski area. And the contrast was incredible. I'd drive through a ski area that was populated by people from Boston and New York and get to the top of the mountain and get out of my car and look over to the White Mountains and look down at Roxbury and think about the contrast. I really see now the ying and the yang of the benefits and the problems of rural life: that the benefits can be problems and the problems can be benefits. The isolation that existed in that town was a real benefit for those students that I worked with those three years. I just found a lot of strength from that isolation. The community was very close, the support for the school was great, the support for the two teachers and was great. We were both involved not only in what took place from 8 to 3 but in our evening programs and our Christmas programs. Christmas was a time when every one came out from the back hills and came down into the town hall to share what the children had worked so hard on during that month. Yet it was the tremendous isolation that made me leave that school. Hannah was a great woman to work with and really an innovative educator. But I needed stimulation that the town and the school could not provide.

I found strength from isolation

I moved out and into another job across the mountains in a more populated area and took the job primarily because of the principalship that I was paid an extra $600 a year to do. It was still a real rural school but it had seven teachers so that the stimulation was greater. It was a very different kind of community in that the people there were influenced by the ski people--city people.

I think that rural education really offers the chance to deal with the whole child. Just a few weeks ago, Jean Eisele of our center's staff and I did some advisory work at one of the smaller schools in our area. It only had four classrooms. We went there and it was balloon day and all the children had tied postcards to the bottoms of their balloons, and they were going to set them off and see how many would be returned by mail. I played my guitar and our videotape took pictures and George Woodard came down from his farm and played his banjo, and there were a couple of other men who helped fill the balloons. A real community feeling. And as we left we just felt pleasure about just being there, and knowing that those children were going to be together for their six years and learn a lot together. A problem is that in rural schools there aren't the wealth of cultural resources that exist in an urban life. But the benefit is that rural schools have a need to tap local people to come to classrooms or to bring kids out, and that shows kids how wealthy their people really are.

Paul: Twenty-five years ago my wife, Cathy, and I were taking our first teaching positions, and we headed west out of Denver on the Denver and Rio Grande California Zephyr. It's a beautiful trip--up the east face of the Rockies through about 30 tunnels and out onto the Western Slope near Winter Park, then down the Colorado River. About five hours out of Denver the train stopped for a crew change at the little town of Bond where we got off. We were met by one of the McCoy school board

members, a section foreman for the railroad, who drove us the four miles on down river to McCoy, officially listed in the Hammond Atlas as having a population of 10. It consisted of a large hunting lodge, a small general store, a small church, and a school. McCoy was 30 miles of rough gravel road from the nearest highway. There was one telephone in town, in the general store. We were interviewed by three board members, the other two teachers who were the other half of the high school staff, their wives, and during the afternoon we were fully investigated by a couple of dogs who wandered through the classroom where the interviews took place.

Two things came through in the interview. One: they wanted people who would fit into the community. They did not want individuals who were going to come in and try to reform the folks. They tended toward inbibing a bit, and the last superintendent had been run off because he tried to change their ways. Secondly, they wanted to get the school accredited. They had been convinced by the state department that their school needed to be accredited so that their graduates could go on to college.

They did not want us to reform the folks

We learned a lot that first year, probably more than the kids. Cathy taught typing, four years of English, music--which was her major--and home ec. I taught a couple of classes of math and chemistry and was the superintendent of schools. The enrollment consisted of 15 boys and seven girls. Their interests were hunting, wrestling steers, being bucked off horses, playing basketball. They had not yet discovered the usefulness of literature, music, or science. We taught our classes as we had been taught, standing in front of the classroom lecturing, with perhaps as many as five students reluctantly participating. We learned that on Fridays when basketball season started little, if any, schooling took place. We went to the state tournament that year. We also learned to drink our whisky straight; at halftime we were expected to join members of the board in the parking lot to pass the bottle around.

Once settled, we worked on getting the school accredited. During the second year of our tenure we created a new class or two, filled out all the necessary forms, added the remains of a community library and a free set of the Great Books to the school library, had the library books catalogued, and were ready for the outside visitation team. They visited and observed for one day, consulted, left, and within a couple of weeks we received our official letter informing us that our school was now officially accredited. In the board's eyes and in the eyes of the state, the McCoy school had been improved.

As with most teachers who teach in high schools of that size, we left at the end of the second year. The isolation, the lack of cultural fit, had done us in. The first notion that I think we need to be aware of in working with rural education, illustrated by this story, is the importance of fit between the school and the community; the fit between the educators who come into the community and the local folks who have been there for a long time. Program quality in small schools is almost entirely people dependent. An important dimension of quality is some degree of continuity. Building a quality program when 50 percent of the staff turns over every two years is very unlikely. The McCoy school board was aware of the need for cultural fit when they warned us about trying to change the local habits. Unfortunately, they were not sufficiently aware of the critical need for continuity, nor in a position to find ways of getting that continuity in their staffing and therefore

in their school program.

Twenty-five years later, in studying 14 rural school change projects for the National Institute of Education, the one generalization that we could draw across the the successful programs had to do with school and community fit. School improvement efforts that were addressing problems recognized to be problems by the local community--not just the education system--seemed to be successful. If the problems being addressed were not recognized as being important by the larger community, the programs ended as soon as the dollars were spent. If you work in rural schools, you're also working with the larger rural community. Because of the tightly knit, personal characteristics you can't work with one without the other.

The other notion that I think is important stems specifically from our McCoy experience with accreditation. It is the notion that the little rural school structure is indeed different from the school system in urban and suburban areas. Specifically, in rural settings you have an absence of bureaucracy, a very personal kind of social system; traditional values; a homogeneous community; in many cases a high degree of isolation; and obviously small scale. Contrast those characteristics with those of urban school systems which are bureaucratic, specialized, heterogeneous, likely to have liberal values, with quality and efficiency tied to large numbers of students. There is a real incompatibility that is a disadvantage for rural systems because school finance policies, staff training, state regulations and accreditation, instructional materials and curriculum all are designed for larger school systems. We need to re-examine the influence that the mass production school has upon rural schools before we can go about improving rural schools.

Wade: What Paul is saying is that in a teachers' center you've really got to meld the community with your educational program. You must realize that your teachers need to be very much involved in the community, and you must find ways to help them make those connections. I think that time is a big factor when you are a rural teacher, and a teachers' center can find resources of community people and link them with the needs of teachers and students.

Paul: In addition to bringing the community culture into the schools, we need to get the schools into the community. The way education has been professionalized and specialized, schooling has been separated from the community life. We need to get it integrated back into the community. Part of that can be done by bringing community folks into the schools, but it also seems to me that we need to look the other way--bringing school activities out into the community.

Wade: We were talking this morning about the conflict that a teachers' center may have in providing programs to parents. The center is supposed to be for teachers. But by providing parents programs--such as for preschoolers--we strengthen the connections between teachers and parents.

Heidi Watts (Grassroots Center, Cortland, NY): I'm thinking about what Paul has described and what I have experienced as a "them-us" situation. The newcomer arrives with educational ideas that are different from those of the community, and those confrontations almost always mean loss of the thing that you, the newcomer, want to accomplish. I'm thinking that perhaps one of the things that teachers' centers can do is to play a modeling role for teachers in ways of affirming the values of the rural situation in which you are located. Maybe what we need to do is to think about ways in which the

teachers' center can help teachers tell the community that we value what is fine and unique about rural situations; that we may have some ideas that are different--and there is no point in pretending that we don't--but that there is much here that we long to be a part of. Otherwise new teachers come in fired up with new ideas and then in our naivete and arrogance prevent everything that we've come to do.

Mike Holdinghaus (St. Louis Teachers' Center): One of the successes our center had was to prepare new teachers for parent-teacher conferences. We brought some parents in to meet with the teachers and talk about what their needs were, and all of a sudden all of these teachers spoke up: "I didn't know that's what you were feeling when you told me that!" All sorts of new things came out of that and also allowed us to find out why misunderstandings were happening.

Peter Martin (RISE, Colchester, CT): In our area some of the rural values are beginning to disintegrate--through television, ease of transportation to larger urban areas, influx of people from outside. All of these forces are creating a very difficult problem of continuity in the community. It's very much in a state of change. I wonder what the center can do about this change. We have a community of primarily agrarian people, plus some people who commute to work. And these commuters bought their homes on their two acres, and they moved there because it was a beautiful, simple community. They had the image that if there were going to be chicken farmers there would be a couple of little coops. But the farmers can't survive on that scale any more. They're getting together and they're making farming an industry in this town, and those new residents are upset.

Gloria Wilson-Miller (Harrisonburg, VA): I'm concerned if the state and federal governments begin to impose the same rules and regulations on our rural schools and our rural community as they do on urban and suburban schools. We are seeing many programs that the state mandated--sex education and driver education-throw the community into upheaval. The same thing that Peter was talking about is happening in our Shenandoah Valley. We've got these outside people coming in from Southeast Virginia cities, who commute three hours, and who want to put us farmers back to the Dark Ages so that we cannot survive.

Gretchen Thomas: And they've thought through their decision about what they want, so it really puts it to the rural people to begin to think through their own decisions about what they're doing and what they want.

NEW OPTIONS FOR RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS

By Paul Nachtigal

[At the 1981 Rural Centers Workparty in Petit Jean State Park, Arkansas, Paul Nachtigal described some fresh ideas about rural high schools, and other participants in the session chimed in with ideas of how teachers' centers might help spread such new ideas. The transcript that follows has been edited selectively to highlight ideas that seem worth mulling over, talking about, adapting, and passing around

the rural network to generate more familiarity with new approaches, some brainstorming and experimenting.]

In talking about what's different about rural high schools, it is important to look at these characteristics: Small rural communities are obviously much more personal and tightly knit. You see the same people at the grocery store, doctor's office, school, church. There is an intensity about those relationships that has implications for who one hires, how one operates, and what you can and can't do in a small town.

Residents tend to be generalists rather than specialists--the doctor, if there is one, is a general practitioner, the contractor builds the whole house. What small rural schools are crying for are people who can work as generalists rather than specialists, teachers who are more broadly prepared. Most education preparation is far too specialized to be of much worth to small rural schools.

Other characteristics: Rural communities tend to be more homogeneous than urban communities though this isn't true across the board. Rural communities tend to be non-bureaucratic. Communication is more likely to be verbal than written. (I don't think I ever wrote a memo in McCoy, Colorado, with seven teachers. We talked across the desk and beside the fishing stream.) Who says something is probably as important as what's said. You need people's trust and confidence for them to really accept your information.

Values are more traditional than in cities. Rural people tend to be entrepreneurs--shopkeepers, farmers--rather than part of a corporate labor force. Rural folks tend to make do, whereas we urban types want to leave our problems to the experts. Statistically, rural communities are still poorer in terms of available dollars to spend. And they tend to have less formal education than their urban counterparts.

One of the major problems in rural education is that everything outside of urban areas gets grouped as rural. I think we need to begin to describe more precisely what we are talking about. Although there are some common characteristics that tend to go across community lines, there are certain differences within rural communities. I think there are three fairly distinct types. First is the traditional middle-America kind of community, fairly well off, fairly homogeneous. Everybody works hard and holds to the same values. At the other end of the spectrum is the poor rural minority community--Appalachian whites, blacks, Chicanos, Indians. Political and economic control lies outside the community with the BIA, the large plantation owner, the lumber mill, the coal industry. A third distinct type is found around ski resorts, energy developments. This is the transitional community, a community where there are diverse expectations for the schools because of new people coming in with different values and expectations.

The small rural high school that reflects these attributes has additional unique characteristics. The smaller the school, the more likely that there will be a high turnover of teachers and administrators. In the high school you are likely to have three or four teachers who are local people and a part of that social structure, who have been there for ten to 15 years or forever. You are also likely to have another group of teachers that are young, on the start of their career, on their way to something bigger and better. If you come in with an innovation you're very likely to attract the young professional, who's interested in working his way up. You

will get more resistance from the locals because they will test the ideas against what it means for their relationship within the local social scene.

Small high school curricula tend to be college prep. If the kids can leave the community and go on to college, nobody is going to complain very much about the school. I think in this regard education has sold rural communities a bill of goods. We've convinced parents that only college prep is education. I think students in rural schools ought to have that option but they also should have the skills to stay in the community if that is their desire. Schools seldom teach the entrepreneurship skills necessary to make that choice.

Small schools, different rules

David Tyack's One Best System (Harvard University Press) describes the public school as a mass production system. He talks about how education has deliberately adopted an industrial model that works best with large numbers. Classes are specialized, content is divided up into very narrow chunks. The more teachers, the more courses offered, the better the program. If you try to apply "one best system" standards to these small schools, they are obviously second best. One cannot offer the same number and variety of courses with a small staff. Good education need not be offered in such a specialized way. Small rural schools need a different set of rules to play by.

At McRel (MidContinental Regional Education Laboratory) we are working with Ron Colton of the Mountain View Center for Environmental Education (at the University of Colorado, Boulder). Ron developed a Rural Studies Program for small schools in England, which capitalized on the flexibility of small size and which used the school environment as the basis for curriculum. We are trying to use some of these same ideas to develop an approach to instruction that is more appropriate for small rural schools. Why should students in these schools study science from a textbook more appropriate to San Diego when they have access to the real world of science right outside the school door? For instance, one unit Ron is developing is a study of weeds, a resource available to most small schools. Such a study can include plant propagation, need for weed control, pros and cons of chemical use, soil analysis, study of wind and weather. By using what is naturally available, students are likely to learn more useable science than they would get from a textbook.

This would require getting students out in the field--perhaps scheduling science in half-day blocks, sharing a well-trained science teacher among four or five schools. Such an approach to science teaching would seem to answer some of the shortcomings identified by NSF of current science programs--their failure to teach a scientific way of thinking about the environment.

Energy is another topic well suited to small school science. In addition to relating energy to food production, science programs could help the community in energy conservation efforts. With proper training, students could conduct energy audits, provide assistance in weatherizing homes, and perhaps even do retrofitting with passive and active solar collectors. A student-constructed solar greenhouse could provide good instruction for students and perhaps supply local merchants with a source of fresh produce.

Another area we want to explore and that ties back to this close school-community dependence is using the school as a way of beefing up the community economy rather than being only a drain on local resources. We are trying to

see whether the school can serve as a rural development agency in the community. Daryl Hobbs of the University of Missouri believes that students can, with proper supervision, do economic inventories. Where do people drive for what kinds of services and with what frequency? In this age of rising energy costs, at some point the equation is going to tip and people are going to be more likely to purchase services closer to home if they are available. Once such opportunities are identified, training can be secured for interested students. With the technical skills and some entrepeneurship training, the students would have the option to stay in the local community if they so desire.

In order to test some of these options, we are establishing a Small School Design Network to work with rural schools that have to do something different or close. These communities are most likely to be receptive because they don't want to lose their schools. The first network is being put together in conjunction with South Dakota State University out of Brookings. Within an hour's drive from there are eight or nine schools too small to operate an effective school in a traditional manner. We hope to work with six or seven of these schools, the largest of which will have 50 students in high school, the smallest 35. The critical element is getting the University to provide technical assistance over time. Our Lab is bringing in people like Ron Colton to work with teachers, carry on workshops, and help them think through alternative designs for the local schools and the community. Obviously, science is going to be one area we will start with because they have difficulty finding science teachers.

Developing alternative patterns for small schools will not be easy, and we have no illusions that it will happen rapidly. I am, however, convinced that if we come up with options that are not going to cost a lot of money and that they have helped design just perhaps, in five years there may be two or three schools beginning to operate differently. We have 700 school systems in the Midwest that need this kind of help if they are going to stay open. Population is declining, dollars are getting tighter, distances are too long to bus, so they have to do something else.

[The first commentaries from other Workparty participants about these ideas were concerns over the problems of resistance to innovating.]

**For teachers to work on the kind of stuff that Ron is doing requires that there is faith in the teachers. That goes against the sentiment in those rural communities where most of the taxpayers don't have children, that what they want to pay their money for is reading, writing, and arithmetic, period. Although I am sure that reading, writing, arithmetic is going to get much better served by that way of teaching, the case has got to be somehow presented, and probably has got to get itself separately funded or coordinated by volunteers until it can prove itself. Then the locals will buy into it because it is valuable.

**I can see that you first have to convince the school board and the people who are influential in the town. But the school board spends time on things that are required and that they feel knowledgeable about, like budgets and school buildings, not curriculum.

**It may also be difficult to convince teachers. There is not only the problem of teachers saying, "This is another thing added on." They have so much of their personal ego invested in knowing something no one else knows. I can see that you first have to

convince the school board and the people who own the town.

**I'd like to see a list of ideas about how to start something different in small traditional high schools, how to work with teachers so they start thinking in a different way.

**I'm wondering if you could not do something around what used to be, with teachers, administrators, some of the older people. Years ago our town had a community theater, a community newspaper, a community garden, festivals, all sorts of things that no longer happen because there is no one putting it together. I wonder if it wouldn't work to just say, "Let's bring back a little of what was."

**We need to use our networks, feed in ideas that are appropriate for rural high schools. The idea of using a network is important because there is such a tide going against change. You need support from others.

Paul: One needs to build an esprit d'corps among several superintendents. A retreat might be a way to bring them together around topics of their interests, such as block scheduling, microcomputers, sharing teachers. You have to convince rural people that this is not some kind of conniving to get them to merge their schools.

States must allow changes in rural schools

If the operation of rural schools is to change, it is absolutely essential to get special dispensations from the state. You have to search around and find people who are beginning to re-examine what it is they are doing and work with them. The schools here in Arkansas have been working on using the school as a rural development agency. One school has decided to publish a full-blown community newspaper. They have incorporated into a non-profit organization run by students. That is both an educational and a service function. The catalyst for this has been Bob Bell, with Arkansas Community Education. He has managed to get small amounts of money through Rockefeller and Mott. He is attempting to expand the idea of the community-school movement beyond adult education and community use of the building to a rural education/rural community development concept.

**We have a lot of rural groups here in Arkansas and there are not any ties between them, and I'm just wondering who I should talk to to get some ties formed.

Paul: My work here has primarily just been personal contact. I've known Bob Bell for a long time. I think you should call up Bob Bell, just make a personal connection.

**I would like to know what a teachers' center might try in order to make the beginnings happen of community involvement in the schools. How would we even approach it? We don't have any authority to say to our superintendent, "You have to bring in this group to help us plan."

Paul: Just paying for travel can give you some authority: the authority of bringing in people with new ideas. Also if you have sufficient history of working with local superintendents, when you ask them to do something, they are more inclined to do it than not.

**The kind of science course you were talking about with small high schools is the kind of course that we are trying to do with our small high schools in Vermont. I'd like our center to do pretty much what you are talking about. We do have credibility in that school, we do have the teachers, and a lot of parents are involved with the teachers' center.

**I think a teachers' center might make a deliberate attempt to bring all the opinion leaders to-

gether on a formal basis, at some point, to get the agendas out on the table and see if they can reach some consensus about new goals for the school. If you can't get past that, there will be hell to pay if you try to make changes.

**I think it's important that this kind of information be collected and passed around in a network because it can be helpful to others, it can help people who need to make changes do so with some creative thought and planning rather than going with the standard high school curriculum.

**I realize that it is a lot more fun to come up with these good ideas than to put them into operation. I don't think there is one person in the school district I am working in who has even thought about these ideas. I think the ideas should be in circulation more because a new concept has to be around for a while before it gets to the stage of people saying they want to do something.

HOW A RURAL SUPERINTENDENT CAN HELP START A TEACHERS' CENTER

By John M. Wheeler

[As superintendent of Dryden, New York school district, John Wheeler is involved with the Grassroots Teacher Center in Cortland and is working with Heidi Watts, Grassroots director, and Lorraine Keeney to plan the fifth annual Rural Workparty, to be held June 1-5, 1982, at Raquette Lake Outdoor Education Center near Cortland, for rural teachers' center directors and small school administrators. Prior to coming to Dryden, John was superintendent of the Fabius-Pompey district and one of the initiators of the Central New York Rural Teachers Center. His talk at the 1981 Rural Workparty in Arkansas is based on his experience in starting that center.]

Back when I was in another district (Fabius-Pompey, near Syracuse) I was trying to get all the teachers involved in curriculum work. In a small district that's possible, but you don't have the resources within your community to do it all, so I was trying to find some way to get some help from people outside. This was the beginning of our application for a federal teacher centers grant, which, by the way, we never got. But the center we started is still alive, and I want to point out the three questions we started with: How can a teachers' center be made to work in a rural region? How can you get around the fact that a small district can't afford one? How can teachers be involved in a responsible way, taking initiative? We began with five or six districts collaborating, and with the help of the SUNY College at Cortland.

In the process of getting a teachers' center started in a rural area, the superintendent's first step is to set the stage and increase people's awareness of the uniqueness of the people served in the district, the uniqueness of the needs of the kids, and the uniqueness of characteristics of the the staff, and their need to share their concerns and their ideas of what works.

Then, because of the limitations on fiscal resources, one has to recognize the probable inability to go it alone, and identify several superintendents that can communicate well with each other so that their districts can work together to identify their common uniqueness and also their unique uniqueness. Next, a superintendent needs to find those people within the district who see a value in the direction you are going, who will align themselves with your effort and your beliefs. For instance, I had a planning director who was interested in working with the university, and I also had teachers within buildings who were very willing to support a teachers' center. So we superintendents reviewed our staffs and identified those people who understood the community, understood our uniqueness, and were willing to put extra time and effort into it. We also had to look at the things the various cooperating districts could contribute that didn't cost dollars. In one of our cooperating districts we had a building principal who got hold of our notion and convinced his superintendent of the value of a teachers' center. Basically, we needed someone who could authorize the use of a room, who would turn his back when the ditto machines were being used, free a teacher at 2:30 p.m., or cover a class. If you are without that kind of help, the teachers' center isn't going to go.

Several districts work together

One of the things that we school people oftentimes overlook is that there are people in our communities who can help us. We need to assess our resources and scan the community for experts. Every now and then something good happens to you. I found a fellow in our community who is a private consultant for managerial services for schools and colleges across the country. He worked with our school board to help them better understand their roles, and with our teachers' center planning group. He charged us nothing. There are lots of people on a school district staff who are related to somebody that can help you. I have a little questionnaire card that I give to staff members. Whether they are cafeteria workers or bus drivers or teachers, they have husbands, wives, sons, daughters who are related to people in our nearby colleges--Cortland and Cornell. That's the kind of resource assessment I'm talking about, and it really needs to come from the central office.

Building support is a key factor, and it is the administrator, the person who leads the public meetings, who has to speak positively about cooperative efforts. When talking with boards of education he says that there are some things we ought to talk to other districts about, or when talking with other superintendents he says that there are good reasons to have confidence in the professional aims and judgment of teachers, and downplays the worry about teachers' control. You just have to pick out those things that a superintendent can do and has to do to make a teachers' center work. He can't do it alone--I'm not trying to give the impression that this is a great one-man crusade--but without him bringing the central idea to the people in the community and on the school board, they are never going to think that the center is really important.

You have to have the center talked about in teachers' meetings, and select and identify people in individual school buildings who can contribute support and work, but if I, as superintendent, don't buy, out of my budget, the bulletin board for the teachers' room that says "Teachers' Center" on it, they are not going to see me as supportive. It doesn't cost much. If I had to pay for it out of my own pocket I would still do it. It's the act that is important. Unless you can show the teachers that the

Pick ONE task and make it work

superintendent is going to do those kinds of things, teachers are just going to say, "That's another passing fancy and it's never going to happen."

The superintendent also needs to demonstrate his sincerity through small supportive actions such as stopping by a classroom, seeing a teacher using something that came from the teachers' center, or knowing that that teacher went to a workshop last week. You say, "Gee, I'm glad you went." Or you take the time to write a note to let them know you know that they are participating.

Putting the teachers' center together and making it work once it's off the ground requires several small things that I try to do on a regular basis: encouraging teachers in leadership, approving requests for teachers to attend planning sessions, setting aside money for substitutes for teachers participating in the center, attending organizational and advisory meetings, approving requests to distribute materials and send notices, and being flexible so as to facilitate rather than hinder. For instance, I don't bug people about their phone calls on teachers' center business. The superintendent can provide postage for reasonable correspondence, set aside bulletin board space for the teachers' center, allow copies to be run, keep the school board informed, provide the community with positive statements.

Most important, help teachers select ONE significant activity for the teachers' center first effort and make sure it works. Do one thing and do it well, and then wave your flag and show everybody, and tell them time and time again. "I don't know if it will work all the time," you can say, "but we tried it once and it worked. Here is what happened, and here are the benefits we got out of it." Too often we think too big. We are not going to make a lot of changes all at once. We are going to involve all of our staff members in planning. For heavens sake, don't take six objectives and try to work on them all at once.

My last point is really the first point: where to start. That is to define the most prominent educational concerns in your district or districts. The current literature suggests several: declining enrollments, reduced number of teachers, the "graying" of the staff (we are getting grayer not only because of our advancing age but because of stress) the loss of state and federal funds, the special mandates placed on schools.

With those local concerns in mind, become familiar with the teachers' center notion and BELIEVE that cooperative ventures in education--among school districts, and among teachers and administrations--are more necessary than ever if schools are to make significant strides in the 1980's.

TOUCHING INWARD SPRINGS

By Kathleen Devaney

[This talk by the director of the Teachers' Centers Exchange was given at the start of the Workparty for Rural Teachers' Centers held in June 1980 at Fort Robinson, Nebraska.]

Growing up in rural Minnesota, I was a child of the prairie. So I got off the plane yesterday morning in Sidney and literally opened my arms to the great, flat fields, and the wide pale sky. It was, I think, an instinctive gesture of belonging. I wanted to return what I felt was the land's embrace and the sky's embrace of me. My parents were children of immigrant farmers, my father's family from Germany, my mother's from Sweden. My father's mother came on a sailing ship from Germany after the Civil War, and I remember her telling me about that and her chanting to me the rhymes from McGuffy's Reader that she learned in her school in Racine, Wisconsin. My mother's father helped his pioneer father build a log house near Scandia, Minnesota, a hundred years ago. (This is the Swedish settlement that was the setting for the movie "The Immigrants," which you may have seen.) That house still stands on the grounds of a national historic monument--the one-room, Hay Lake School, where my mother received her first eight years of education.

Stir up young minds

Schools like Hay Lake School were the cradle of American public education. Their most important task and reason for existence was the preparation of an informed, intelligent, and productive citizenry. Democracy was, after all a new and daring experiment. It required a new and extraordinary institution to prepare a population for economic self-sufficiency and political self-government. I think this American reason for the existence of the public schools has often been forgotten today in a culture which has become pervasively individualistic. Some people call ours the Me Society, some call it the Now Society, and the old-fashioned priority for community has given way to a priority for separate persons to enjoy the here and now.

I think that shift in priority throws light on the difficulty we are having with the federal government mandates that have been placed upon the schools, such as desegregation and mainstreaming. Although at root they are efforts to strengthen the republic--the whole community--by strengthening the economic power and political wisdom of all the citizens, the way that we interpret these mandates is mostly in terms of adding individual contributions to the community's strength. It seems to me that there's a very delicate balance here, a necessary and constant shifting of emphasis back and forth between the school's concern to educate the individual and its concern to build a community. And I think this is a balance that is so delicate that it cannot possibly be written down in laws or be taught in management, organizational development, or community development courses. I think that balance between individualism and community must be accomplished by an ineffable but powerful strand of connection between the individual and the community: people's feelings of belonging in their place, in their neighborhoods, in their towns, belonging to their landscape. I think the crisis of urban education in our time results in part from a failure of schools to preserve the quality of belonging.

What is it about that feeling

of belonging, that connection between school and the rest of life, that might be so vital for learning? Is it merely affect? Is it merely that children need to feel comfortable and approved of? Or does the feeling of belonging also affect cognition? I think belonging does feed cognition. I think learning must be connected to the rest of living. In times past, the American public were confident that what went on in school needn't amount to much more than the basics--mastery of words and numbers. This is the piece of learning that went on in the one-room rural school.

But in times past our schools and teachers were able to bank on the practical living experience that students would bring to the classroom, and the connection that teachers could make with the students' homes, communities, and natural environment. In our time now and in places--big cities or towns--where teachers cannot count on the continuity between the community and the classroom so that students feel that they do belong, and in places where students' experiences before they go to school and outside of school do not give them the deep learning that the words and numbers skills are based on, we are finding it difficult to teach even the barest skills. But rural schools have not lost their connection with the environment, with families, with communities, and with all of these forces that have begun the processes of learning in children long before they enter the classroom and that continue the processes of learning in the spaces after school.

The idea of the connection of schools to community and to natural life has always been at the heart of the teachers' center innovation. The fallacy that learning for children isn't anything more than mastery of reading and writing, phonics and arithemetic, produces a comparable fallacy that professional growth and problem solving for teachers isn't anything more than inservice courses that are run by policy boards that have a majority of teachers on them. The power of the teachers' center concept for me lies in its capacity to perceive and to preserve, or to restore, a sense of wholeness and belongingness to the whole schooling process.

I was in Nantucket last April to visit John Miller at the Nantucket teachers' center. On the day I spent in his center a former member of the school board came over--he is the Unitarian minister--and brought me a copy of his sermon of the day before. I had gone to that church because I wanted to see the inside of this historic, very beautiful building, and I was astonished to hear him preach about William Ellery Channing, a great influence on my youthful idealism, whom I had forgotten. The minister, Ted Anderson, quoted Channing on education in these words:

> I do not think that as much harm is done by giving error to a child as by giving truth in a lifeless form. The great end in instruction is not to stamp our minds irresistably on the young, but to stir up their own. Not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own; not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent love of truth; not to form an outward regularity, but to touch inward springs; not to burden the memory, but to quicken and strengthen the power of thought; not to bind them by ineradicable prejudices to our particular sect or peculiar notions, but to prepare them for impartial, conscientious judging of whatever subjects may, in the course of Providence, be offered to their decision.

It was astonishing to me how

contemporary that is, which was written in the early 1800s. I quote it because I think that teachers' centers serving rural communities have not yet lost the chance to significantly affect the connection between community and schools that is so clearly the message of Channing's words. As education leaders you have a chance to speak out loudly and clearly your conviction and experience that the schools need all the institutions in the community to help you teach. That you need the churches, the work places, the agencies of the government, the social environment, and the natural environment. And that they need you. And that you want to be teaching partners with everything you can find to connect children with the life that they want to live outside the school.

In our determination to be responsive to individual needs, teachers' centers undertake needs assessments and trust that they will guide the design of programs in the center. But I also think that we must be very watchful that these needs assessments not become instruments merely for measuring emptiness. I think before we assess needs, we and the teachers we serve need to measure our fullness in rural and small town education. What learnings are our kids bringing with them when they come into the classroom? What have they learned already, or what are they in the process of learning from their closeness to the land, from the growth of crops, from the profusion of wild life, the vulnerability to weather, the circle of the seasons? What are they learning from the close ties that they have to the past through the lives of older people in communities? What are your kids learning from the agricultural and commercial work that they can observe and take part in so much more easily than students in urban areas? What are they learning of music and literature and rhetoric in the churches--

Let's measure our *fullness*

not to speak of character building and moral and spiritual development? All of these things have been profound learning experiences, perhaps more important than the school, in past years in rural education. They have been the deep, daily, subliminal but powerful sources of learning on which mere schooling--that is the mastery of reading and writing and facts--could be built.

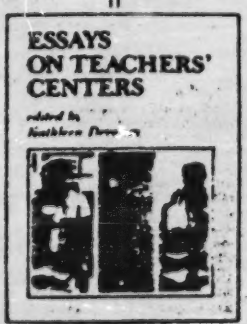
I think that once your teachers' center has helped teachers to make that kind of a wealth assessment, then you'll be in a position to think of the additional opportunities and needs that exist in your community for learning collaborations among teachers and farmers, and businessmen, and librarians, and civic officials and police, and social workers, and ministers. I have a very strong feeling that these resources are more powerful, if you can figure out how to use them, than the published materials that you import. And I further believe that skillfully building the education out of the life of the community can help to keep kids in the rural community. Finally, I think that just as you press for a definition of children's curriculum being more than skills, being connected with and belonging to the whole life that kids live in the community, so also you need to manifest a definition of the teachers' center as being concerned for the whole working life of the teacher. The teachers' center is not simply unconnected bits and pieces of curriculum and methods that can be picked up in a workshop and grafted onto a lesson plan. That is what we know how to do. What we have to learn how to do--and what is the tremendous difficulty and puzzlement but really the challenge and opportunity and reason for existence of the teachers' center--is to be able to create a setting and an atmosphere within which teachers feel their connection to each other and gain the courage to break out of the four walls of their

classroom, break out of the hard and soft covers of their textbooks, use their own inner knowledge.

So I think that the teachers' center's most important goal should be to empower teachers to act confidently from their inner knowledge, to act with each other, and to act with the community. I know, because it's our experience, that much of what we all have to do, you in your centers and we in the Teachers' Centers Exchange is, bureaucratic. It means following procedures, fulfilling requirements. Much of what we have to do is what William Ellery Channing called "forming outward regularities." But I think we'll lose the point of the whole teachers' center enterprise unless we remember that the essential mission that we're all about is what Channing prescribed and what the legendary one-room schools accomplished, which is "to touch inward springs."

PUBLICATIONS

Building a Teachers' Center, edited by Kathleen Devaney, is a collection of 16 articles that give first-hand accounts from teachers' center leaders of aspects involved in starting a teachers' center. In some of these articles, additional advice has been inserted from the Proceedings of "Workparties"—small conferences of teachers' center leaders, which the Exchange has sponsored since 1977. Thus the book represents the substance—grassroots experience—and the style—self-reflection and voluntary sharing with others—of the teachers' centers network. The book begins with two papers that relate how a combination of convictions, experience, high energy, and happenstance formed the first American teachers' centers. Following are several essays on practical matters—staffing, needs assessment, evaluation, space, programming, workshops, advising, managing, budget, advisory board, funding, and self-publishing. Finally, three articles are provided on centers' relationships with school districts and with parents and community. $10.75 prepaid. Order from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York 10027



Essays on Teachers' Centers, edited by Kathleen Devaney, is a collection of twelve essays about inservice experiences that engage teachers' talents and energies while offering intellectual and emotive stimulation and support. Articles are included on the role of the in-classroom advisor, teacher design of classroom curriculum, and discussions of the varied learning principles underlying teachers' center development and practice. Contributors are Maja Apelman, Sharon Feiman, William Fibkins, Lilian Katz, Robert Mai, Theodore Manolakes, Milbrey McLaughlin, Thomas O'Brien, Adelaide Sproul, and L. C. Taylor. The writings were gathered during 1976 from educators in and around teachers' centers in the United States and England. A selected, annotated bibliography is provided. 199 pp. $10.00 prepaid. Order Department, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103. California residents add sales tax.

WHAT'S A TEACHERS' CENTER?

A teachers' center is a program for teachers' ongoing education. ...

- *which offers a local meeting and work place, leadership, counsel, materials, stimulation, and peer exchanges and opportunities for reflection on learning and teaching . . .*
- *for purposes of school and classroom problem-solving, curriculum development, mutual support, and professional growth. . .*
- *funded by local school district or county office, grants (federal, foundation, corporate), state department of education, college of education, or operated as an independent non-profit corporation.*

WHAT'S THE TEACHERS' CENTERS EXCHANGE?

The Teachers' Centers Exchange is an information, referral, and technical assistance center funded by the National Institute of Education (U.S. Department of Education) at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco. The Exchange coordinates a give-and-take network of more than 300 active teachers' centers across the United States, plus that many more organizations, groups, and individuals working to start centers. Relying on the experience, talent, and good will available in the network, the Exchange matches requests for assistance with providers of expertise. It works to strengthen, stretch, and advocate for the network of centers that project the following common purposes:

- *to respond to teachers' own definitions of their continuing learning needs with assistance and instruction that help teachers enrich and activate the learning experience of the children of their own classrooms.*
- *to provide an environment where teachers may come to work on materials or projects for their classrooms, receive instruction individually and together, and teach and encourage each other.*
- *to advise and assist teachers in their schools, working in the spirit of finding the teacher's own starting points for improvement.*

The Exchange is available to all who share such purposes for staff development and who would value informal interactions in the network. There's no fee. Reach the Exchange in San Francisco (1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco 94103, (415) 565-3095); in Washington, D.C. (Lorraine Keeney, 1755 Church Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20003, (202) 332-1494); or in Connecticut (Gretchen Thomas, Box 1047, Amston, Connecticut 06231, (203) 537-1306).

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